

## **Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval, and Recruitment**

***G.1.** Discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the requirement to establish and maintain standards for foster family homes, adoptive homes, and child care institutions in which children served by the agency are placed.*

### **Foster Care**

The Children's Division is responsible for licensing of foster homes, including foster family group homes, per licensing regulations CSR 40-60, CSR 40-72, and Missouri Statute, Chapter 210. Missouri's licensing rules include: approval, denial or revocation of license, number of children, health of foster family, training, physical standards of foster home, sleeping arrangements, fire and safety requirements, care of foster children, and records and reports. Staff utilize the licensing requirements to establish and maintain new and existing licensed foster homes. The Division is in the process of updating the rules to incorporate the competencies that foster families must demonstrate before licensure. (For further explanation of the competencies, see Section D).

Each home is licensed for a 24-month period. Before licensure and at the time of renewal, each applicant and every person in the home 18 years of age and older must complete a criminal background and child abuse/neglect records check. No person with a felony conviction for child abuse or neglect, spousal abuse, a crime against children (including child pornography), or a crime involving violence, rape, sexual assault, or homicide may be licensed. Also banned from licensure are those who in the past five years have had a felony conviction for physical assault, battery, or a drug-related offense. Each Division Region maintains a formal review process of foster homes when there is a "probable cause" determination of child abuse/neglect and/or there are serious infractions of licensing regulations. When a report is unsubstantiated or otherwise brought to the Divisions attention the purpose of the review is to determine the continued use or licensure of the foster home as well as any corrective action to be taken. The emphasis of the reviews is to be strength-based and focused on the best interest of the child. The Review Teams should include non-Children's Division staff (one designated to be the leader or moderator), a licensing supervisor, staff from other program areas and/or counties, and a teaching foster parent. The foster parents whose home is being reviewed participate and are encouraged to bring a support person of their choice.

Missouri's foster parents must complete 27 hours of STARS (Specialized, Training, Assessment, Resource, Support/Skills) Training and demonstrate five competencies before being licensed. An assessment of the home is also completed that entails four in-home consultations and approximately ten hours of interviews with all household members. (See Section D for more information)

### **Adoptive Homes**

The Children's Division is also responsible for the approval of adoptive homes working with Missouri's agency. The process for adoption includes the Spaulding Training, a specialized training curriculum for adoptive families. Spaulding Training is an additional

12 hours of training, following the completion of STARS training. Individuals and families interested in adoption must also have an adoptive home assessment completed following the training and prior to approval.

The agency is proud of Missouri's emphasis on specialized training for both foster parents and adoptive parents. By providing extensive training, the agency hopes to not only prepare individuals and families to care for children who have been abused and neglected, but to assist them throughout their work on the agency's professional team caring for children.

### **Residential/Child Placing Agencies**

The Missouri's Children's Division provides regulatory oversight of Residential Child Caring Agency (RCCA) and Child Placing Agency (CPA) licensure pursuant to 210.486 RSMo. Since 1993, Missouri Statute 210.484 stipulates that RCCA licensure be the responsibility of the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS). DHSS and the Children's Division, however, currently have a mutual agreement for the Children's Division to continue RCCA licensure activities. Licensed RCCA and CPA operating sites are supervised by the Children's Division Residential Program Unit (RPU) where licensing consultants ensure compliance with Chapters 71 & 73 of the Children's Division RCCA and CP rules respectively. When non-compliance occurs, agencies are requested to provide RPU with corrective action plans. Currently, this is being done on a case by case basis using the routine paper RPU inspection documentation. In the case of a complaint, RPU tracks whether or not a corrective action plan is submitted. RPU plans to explore whether or not complaints and other areas of non-compliance, such as physical plant issues, record-keeping, etc, should be tracked quantitatively and placed in a database. It is anticipated that such tracking would increase the labor intensity of the professional and clerical support staff. This will need to be carefully weighed with the potential usefulness of such a database as staff is stretched very thin at this time.

RCCA and CPA rules are comprehensive in that they address issues such as child safety, staff educational qualifications, pertinent experience, staff training, staff/child ratios, appropriate discipline, avoidance and reporting of child abuse/neglect, confidentiality of records, child and staff health issues, physical plant, sanitation, and fire and safety issues, children's services assessment and planning issues, and record keeping.

RCCA and CPA rules are periodically reviewed for updates. A national survey was conducted exploring RCCA licensure issues. RPU staff and a representation from the licensed RCCA community provided input that developed into a revised RCCA rules document. Among other things, the draft revision addresses exclusionary criteria related to potential staff who apply to work for a RCCA and who have a history of crimes against persons such as rape, murder, and serious child abuse/neglect. The same intent is in a CPA draft revision. Currently, it is the decision of the RCCA/CPA administration whether or not to hire someone with a criminal history of crimes against persons. This rule revision would prohibit the hiring of staff with a history of specific crimes against persons. Both the RCCA and CPA drafts are currently pending.

## Roundtable Discussion

### Strengths Identified

- *There is presently sufficient number of staff to monitor licensed facility/homes.*
- *Each agency area has a strength-based, formal process used to review foster homes where there have been child abuse/neglect hotline reports or other concerns raised. The team includes non-Children's Division members.*

### Challenges Identified

- *While limited, child abuse and neglect continues to occur in Alternative Care settings.*
- *Foster parents are in need of additional supportive services.*
- *The agency has limited resources for continued recruitment.*
- *The Foster Care Rules and Regulations need to be updated.*
- *Children would benefit from more active participation of Family Support Team members in the permanency plan process.*
- *Professional and clerical staff shortages will constrain data collection effects in the Residential Program Unit.*

### Recommendations for Improvement

1. *The Residential Program Unit should explore quantitative data collection for non-compliance issues for trend analysis.*
2. *Better support to foster families is needed, beginning with more frequent visits.*
3. *Enhance the selection of placement resources for children by basing placement on a good match of the child's needs and the foster parent's' training and experience.*
4. *Develop more respite providers.*
5. *Foster parents should have more involvement in Family Support Team Meetings.*
6. *Foster home licensing rules and regulations should be revised.*

**G.2.** *Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State plan requirement to ensure that the State's licensure standards are applied equally to all foster and adoptive homes and child care institutions that serve children in the State's care or custody?*

## Foster and Adoptive Homes

Foster parent licensing standards are applied equally to all homes wishing to hold a foster home license by the State. This includes the training, assessment, home safety standards, and meeting of the five competencies necessary for licensure. (See Section D for more information) The agency has also developed comparable training specific to individuals serving as kinship placements (those related or known to the child or child's family). Any licensed foster home, whether kinship or foster home for an unrelated child, must meet the same licensing standards. For adoptive families, they must meet all of the above, and complete the additional Spaulding adoption training and assessment.

The foster home licensing rules dictate licensing standards, and Missouri's agency policy outlines procedures for staff in the licensing of families. This includes the re- licensure of foster and kinship families, which is conducted every two years. The Division does revoke licenses due to violation of licensing rules. In SFY-99, 49 foster home licenses were revoked; in SFY-00, 60 were revoked; in SFY-01, 52 were revoked; in SFY-02, 62 were revoked; and in SFY-03, 27 were revoked. Our data collection system does not allow for a specific reason for revocation so a trend analysis is not possible at this time.

### **Residential/Child Placing Agencies**

The RCCA and CPA rules are applied equally to all licensed RCCA and CP agencies. There is provision for an agency to request a variance of a particular rule, for example, related to maximum capacity or age range, during a specific licensure period. Initial licensure of an agency may only be for a probationary period not to exceed six months. Licensure renewals may be for a period not to exceed two years.

License renewal is tracked by RPU clerical support staff. License renewal packets are sent to licensed agencies at least 90 days prior to licensure expiration and RPU staff inspect the operating site approximately 60 days prior to licensure expiration. The goal is to ensure a timely license renewal process.

### **Roundtable Discussions**

#### Strengths Identified

- *Residential Program Unit staff conducts frequent oversight visits of residential facilities.*
- *Missouri has standardized licensing regulations.*
- *Licensing standards help guide appropriateness of placements.*
- *The flexibility in policy lends to professional discretion.*

#### Recommendations for Improvement

1. *The agency needs a mechanism to measure how residential treatment centers are effectively meeting children's goals.*
2. *The agency needs a mechanism to measure how foster parents are effective meeting children's goals.*
3. *The Division should increase efforts to recruit more minority foster parents.*
4. *Policy enhancements should be made to provide clearer guidelines on foster parent involvement in permanency planning.*

**G.3.** *Citing any licensure or safety data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State plan requirement to conduct criminal background clearances on prospective foster and adoptive families, including those being licensed or approved by private agencies in the State. How does the State address safety considerations with respect to the staff of child care institutions and foster and adoptive families (if agency has opted not to conduct criminal background clearances on foster care and adoptive families)?*

**Foster Care**

Both state regulations and agency policy require criminal record checks on all household members age 18 and older during the licensing and re-licensing process. Currently all prospective and on-going foster/adoptive families register with the Family Care Safety Registry (FCSR), which is maintained by the Department of Health and Senior Services. The Registry contains the following information: state criminal records checks conducted by the Missouri State Highway Patrol, child abuse/neglect records maintained by the Children's Division, the employee disqualification list maintained by DHSS, child care facility licensing records maintained by DHSS, foster parent, residential facility and child placing agency licensing records maintained by the Children's Division, and residential living facility and nursing home licensing records maintained by DHSS. Effective January 2004, the Registry will include the Sexual Offender Registry maintained by the Missouri Highway Patrol. In the meantime, requests for that information are sent directly to the highway patrol. The Division is in the process of enhancing the criminal records check to include a national search with the use of fingerprints. Division management has recently been meeting with members of the Highway Patrol and legislators to overcome the barrier of expense to either the applicant or the Division. Currently, policy requires a name check but not a fingerprint check. In practice, many local offices do require the use of fingerprints.

Specific concerns regarding criminal record checks include the length of time it takes for the local county office to get the results, as well as the checks not showing all records which may be found on an individual. The mandated use of fingerprints should eliminate the latter problem. Another concern is that the Highway Patrol does not maintain records involving specific civil matters, such as an Order of Protection. The Division, as part of the enhancement of background checks, is exploring the use of the Missouri's Case.Net program. Case.Net is an access to the Missouri's State Courts' Automated Case Management System. Information can be found on case records including docket entries, parties, judgments, and charges in public court. Limitations to Case.Net are that only courts that have implemented the case management software as part of the Missouri Courts Automation Project and only cases that have been deemed public under the Missouri Revised Statutes can be accessed.

Three sites across Missouri have been chosen to test a new curriculum, "Confirming Safe Environments." This curriculum is being explored in an effort to increase the emphasis on the safety of the child living in out of home care and the accountability of the worker. (See Section C for more information.)

**Residential/Child Placing Agencies**

Both Chapter 71 of the RCCA rules and Chapter 73 of the CPA rules require criminal background checks as well as child abuse/neglect background checks for staff of those facilities and agencies. The CPA rules further require criminal background checks and child abuse/neglect background checks for foster and adoptive parents. Currently, the criminal background checks are done with a paper review using a person's name, date of birth and Social Security Number. The CPA rules further require a finger print criminal

background check if it is found that a prospective adoptive parent has a criminal conviction.

### **Roundtable Discussions**

#### *Strengths Identified*

- *Foster and adoptive families and employees of Residential/Child Placing Agencies must submit to background checks.*
- *Criminal and child abuse and neglect record checks are conducted for every licensure period for foster and adoptive families.*

#### *Challenges Identified*

- *There appears to be limited resources for finger printing of other household members in foster and adoptive homes.*
- *Access to records for Orders of Protection, misdemeanor charges, etc. on potential foster and adoptive parents has not been resolved however, is under review.*
- *The agency's current policy regarding background checks needs to be enhancement.*

#### *Recommendations for Improvement*

1. *Missouri laws and Division policy should be changed to allow for easier access to circuit court information.*
2. *Written Division policy guidelines should be developed on how to handle background checks on applicants that show restraining orders.*
3. *Complete review and implementing of fingerprinting for foster/adoptive parents should be implemented to provide a nationwide background check.*
4. *The agency should continue to explore and utilize curricula to enhance the assessment of a child's safety and worker accountability while the child is in out of home care.*

**G.4.** *Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State plan requirement to recruit and train foster and adoptive families that represent the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed, including the effectiveness of the State's official recruitment plan.*

Missouri has several ongoing efforts to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families from across the state that represent the diversity of children in the State's care and custody.

The Division has awarded contracts to private agencies that conduct foster and adoptive parent recruitment, training and assessments. The contract specifically targets finding quality homes for children who are of African-American heritage and homes for special needs children. Contractors are given demographic information identifying specific needs of the agency. Prior to 1998, 21 Resource Development Contracts (for the

recruitment, training and assessment of foster and adoptive homes) were awarded to the metropolitan areas. In 1999, an additional 36 were added to the remainder of the state, totaling 57.

Foster parent recruitment efforts across the state have resulted in more African-American foster parents. The Division has also had a decrease in the percentage of children in alternative care who are African American, from 40% in 1999 to 33% in 2002.

Missouri's census data indicates African Americans represent 12% of the total population of the state. African American children, however, make up 35% of the state's children living in poverty. The issue of the over representation of African American children in the public child welfare system is currently being studied throughout the United States and is an issue that is important to Missouri as well.

The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act has been incorporated into Missouri's Child Welfare Practice and training. In addition, in June 2000 Missouri introduced the Transracial Parenting Project, developed by the North American Council on Adoptable Children. Parents who have adopted/fostered, or who are considering adopting/fostering trans-culturally, may volunteer to participate in the project and the participation is kept totally separate from the home assessment process. Foster parents are given in-service training credit.

Missouri's partnership with The Adoption Exchange on Missouri's Adoption Opportunities Grant is in the second year. One specific objective of Missouri's grant is to develop culturally appropriate recruitment, retention, and support strategies that result in a 50% increase in the number of minority applicants approved for adoption. The Division continues to build on the tasks, which include community based recruitment efforts, training related to specific adoption recruitment strategies, Missouri's 800 phone line for adoptive families, and adoption specific lending libraries in all areas of the state.

Missouri has effectively used part of the Adoption Incentive Funds received for completion of permanency for waiting children to implement a statewide recruitment campaign. The agency has developed and begun distribution of new recruitment brochures and has expanded the use of media recruitment, including television and radio segments, billboards, and child specific efforts. This is the first statewide recruitment campaign the agency has had in many years, and it is believed Missouri's efforts will be very successful.

Missouri's One Church One Child Program has three current sites: the metropolitan areas of Kansas City and St. Louis, and the rural community of Monroe City. The agency is in the process of expanding this program to include Cole and Callaway Counties. This program brings together the African-American faith community, partnering with the Division, to develop recruitment opportunities for African American children awaiting permanency. The agency held its first One Church One Child statewide conference in the fall of 2001. Following the conference, several other sites across the state expressed a desire to start a project within their community. There is not any data to support the success of this program.

A new opportunity for the Children's Division has been the Family to Family Project in St. Louis City. This project, funded by the Casey Family Projects, selected the metropolitan site of St. Louis City due to the large percentage of African American children in care, and the large number of children from that region who are placed outside their own community. The Family to Family Project strives to find placements for children within their own communities which reflect the child's cultural and ethnic background. While this is a relatively new project, the agency is very excited about the possibilities it brings in partnering with other agencies and the community development opportunities.

### **Roundtable Discussions**

#### *Strengths Identified*

- *The One Church/One Child Program is very strong in the St. Louis area.*
- *The Multi-Ethic Placement Act is incorporated into agency policy.*
- *The introduction of the Transracial Parenting Project allows families another source of support.*

#### *Challenges Identified*

- *The agency is lacking minority homes (African-American) to meet agency needs.*
- *There appear to be conflicting federal requirements regarding selecting a placement resource that is in closest proximity of the child's home versus resource availability.*
- *Missouri's foster and adoptive recruitment resources are limited.*
- *There is a limited understanding of ethnic issues among some Children's Division staff.*

#### *Recommendations for Improvements*

1. *The Division should systemically identify qualities of successful foster and/adoptive parents and utilize such qualities for foster and adoptive recruitment.*
2. *The Division should increase and enhance partnerships with various ethnic communities.*
3. *To increase efforts to recruit minority families.*

**G.5.** *Citing any data available to the State, discuss how effective the State has been in meeting the State plan requirement to recruit and use adoptive families for waiting children across State or other jurisdictional boundaries. In responding, consider relevant agency policies, timeframes for initiating recruitment activities, and specific methods.*

Missouri has successfully recruited families and placed children in various homes across the state, as well as with families out of state. Missouri strongly supports the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children (ICPC) when children are to be placed with a family out of state. ICPC is a legally and administratively sound means of permitting child placement activities throughout the country in much the same way and with the same



services as though they were being conducted within a single state. One hundred twenty-six Missouri youth were adopted by families out of state during SFY-02. The following year, 1996 Missouri youth were adopted by families located out of state.

Many families have expressed interest in waiting children as a result of Missouri's website. This website lists profiles and pictures of children awaiting a permanent placement. The agency also uses the AdoptUSKids and the Adoption Exchange website, both national websites, as recruitment efforts for Missouri's children. It would be difficult to collect data for children adopted through the use of national websites because of the variety of those recruitment resources. Missouri families, as well as out-of-state families for whom the agency has an approved home study, are staffed for potential matches during Missouri's Second Level Matching Team. (See Section E for more information)

In 2000 the St. Louis County Division staff and the Juvenile court in that county implemented an Adoption Saturday event. This event has become an annual event. The judge and other community partners come together to finalize a mass number of adoptions in a festive affair.

A Division advertising campaign conducted with the Adoption Exchange from September 2002 through March 2003 resulted in 302 responses from across State and other jurisdictional boundaries. Of those responses, 5.96% were the result of direct mailing, 6.95% the result of billboards, 54.3% the result of television, 13.25% the result of radio, 1.32% the result of ads placed on buses, and 19.54% the result of newspaper ads.

## **Roundtable Discussions**

### *Strengths Identified*

- *The Second Level Matching Team is effective in finding homes for children who are difficult to place.*
- *The Interstate Compact for Placement of Children is an effective support for insuring children and families will receive the same level of support and services, regardless of the state where they reside.*
- *The Internet has been an effective resource for matching children to adoptive parents.*
- *Some Missouri Juvenile Courts are helping to make the adoption process more visible in the community.*

### *Challenges Identified*

- *The multiple steps of the Interstate Compact for Placement of Children can affect the timeliness of permanency plans for children.*
- *The finalization of adoption subsidies across jurisdictions creates delays.*
- *There is a need for better financial incentives for placement of children with special needs.*

- *Television and radio ads are costly to use for recruitment efforts.*
- *The Adoption Incentive and Adoption Opportunities Grants are expiring soon.*

*Recommendations for Improvements*

1. *The Division should strive for better financial incentives for special needs adoptions.*
2. *The Division should set aside resources to spend foster and adoption recruitment.*